

# THE ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET

By Charles Francis Bourke

Drawings by Arthur William Brown



"Holler, Ye Harps! I Don't Wonder!"

**B**ILL MARLIN, master gunner and able seaman, croaked melodiously at his domestic duties; but his song was solely one of defiance to his enemy, the First Lieutenant of U. S. S. Chicago, who had condemned him to hard labor, in collaboration with a scrubbing brush, a bucket of suds, and a bar of yellow soap, scouring the perfectly immaculate steel floor of the Captain's cabin; and he was doing it with a great deal of unnecessary disturbance.

It was not the first time, by long odds, that Gunner Marlin had tasted discipline for the good of the service; but it so happened that while he was doing present penance the cruiser steamed into the tropical harbor, dropped anchor, and announced her presence off the Central American town with the thr-rump of a six-pounder. The bang of the saluting gun, the bo's'n's pipe, and the joyous clamor of Jackies on the gun deck made Marlin rise scowling to his cramped knees.

"Holler, ye harps!" he growled. "I don't wonder, w'en the whole bunch o' monkeys is goin' off the ark, an' me sticked up aboard combin' the Captain's cat an' doin' chores like a bloomin' chambermaid w'at don't know a solar plexus from a sassidge!"

A rusty looking battleship, squatting like a horned toad on the bright blue waters of the harbor, slammed off tardy answer to the Chicago's salute. A flotilla of shore boats, scenting dollars, made for the anchored American; while, as a last straw, on the waterfront a perfect rainbow of feminine frippery waved a welcome to the land hungry Jackies.

The exasperated Marlin balanced the scrubbing brush in his brawny hand, with a look of vengeful longing at the First Lieutenant, who lined the rail with the other officers, spick and span in their shore going uniforms.

"If I had my choice, jest for ten consecutive seconds," he said yearningly, "I'd swarm aboard that old Central Ameriky war-junk, an' I'd line up her old turret gun on that there First Lieuten'nt, an' I'd blow 'is brass trimmings clean through his map. I would, if I took the count d'rec'ly afterwards!"

**T**HE voice of authority broke in on his Homeric thoughts of vengeance. "You Bill Marlin! You better quit sojerin', me man, or I'll report you to the First Lieuten'nt! You 'ear?"

It was a bad time for the cabin steward to disturb a fallen warrior's meditations. Marlin glanced at the deck and smiled ingratiatingly. The fatuous steward ventured nearer. The gunner's big claw shot out like a grappling iron and the trim little steward stood on his head in the bucket of soapy water.

"Ho! You'll repawt me to the First Luff, will you, my little man? Well, now, your face is nice and clean, an' that's uncommon. You run right along, me bucko, an' tell 'im—"

He stood appalled. The steward fled; but the form of the First Lieutenant blocked the cabin doorway. Behind him glared the commander himself, who had just come aboard, with a face like a thunder cloud.

"Clap that man in irons!" the commander snapped.

"Or wait—" The officer drew the Lieutenant aside. Through the open port Marlin heard the latter explaining, and he crawled to the window to listen. He was in for it, anyway.

"The fellow has reached the end of his rope!" the Lieutenant said. "I've tried everything short of anasthetics; but he can't or won't stop fighting. You saw for yourself, sir?"

"E calls that fightin'!" Marlin murmured. "M'm. Marlin? Yes, I recall the man." The commander suppressed a laugh. "Gun Captain? Piled up our target record in Hampton Roads?"

"And then rounded up the fleet picking fights on the other gunners!" the officer said bitterly. "When I disrated him, he cleaned up No. 1 turret. The man is a good gunner, all right," the officer grudgingly admitted; "but he's an anarchistic anachronism!"

Marlin doubled his fists doubtfully.

"That brings us down to business," the commander

said seriously. "I have just seen our Consul. We're taking him aboard and sailing at once, under orders for Panama. There'll be no shore leave for the men this trip. President Castello and the revolutionists are about to come to grips ashore. The Consul says that nothing but a miracle can save the Government. You have just time to pay your respects at the palace before we sail."

"If Castello had only had sense enough to get a foreign navy man to whip the Oquinda, that dilapidated battleship of his, into shape," the Lieutenant grumbled, "he could command the coast and put down the revolution in jig time! By George, sir! If the revolutionists take her, I'd like to sprinkle the rascals with a machine gun!"

"Yes, it is hard on you, Mr. Selden. The President's daughter is certainly a charming young lady. Unfortunately, naval warfare does not contemplate the killing of men nowadays. One might ram and sink a ship. If I had my way, I'd slip a gunner aboard to help Castello out of the hole, a first class fighting man; like our friend Bill Marlin, for instance." The commander chuckled. "And, speaking of Marlin, you'd better transfer the rascal to the torpedoboot Ironton at the isthmus. A month or so in a steel oven will sweat the surplus fight out of him. Come down to the wardroom, Mr. Selden."

**O**H, ye ould-incin'j'rary!" Marlin barely checked a shout of defiance. He had once seen service in a torpedoboot in northern waters. He had no desire to repeat the experiment under the blazing sun of the equator, with a chance of winding up his career with "stoker's madness" and a plunge over the side.

The last thought made him catch his breath. For with it was coupled a sudden inspiration. Why, his oppressors had just shown him a way to splice a new length on the "end of his rope," whereby he might climb to temporary safety at least. He sprang up, slapping his thigh.

"By jinks! that's the ticket! The old man shanghai's the Consul w'ile the row's on, so they won't be nobody ashore to pinch me. I'll jine them revolutionists. We'll shoot up the Lieuten'nt's paw in law an' make him produce, an' then I'll skip out. Oh, I ain't a prize gunner for nothing! I'll make ole Casteller sit up!"

On the cruiser's gun deck growls of disappointment had succeeded to gleeful larking as the news of sailing spread. A flotilla of bumboats crowded the ports. It all fell in with Marlin's plan to desert ship.

"They won't be no trouble slippin' ashore—not w'en the bunch knows who's going off," he grinned. "Only, if I'm goin' to run a bluff ashore, I want a swell front." He was alone in the cabin. He caught up the scrub bucket, emptied it over the side, and slipped into the Captain's stateroom. He came out, stuffing a bundle of clothes into the bucket.

"The Captain an' me's about the same ginerall style o' beauty, excep' I'm a better figger," he chuckled. "Mr. Nosy Steward'll get forty-eight days for swipin'

his new clo'es an' his fancy cutlery, and that's poetic justice!"

Walking a little stiffly with one leg, he slipped below. Shortly thereafter Gunner Marlin was noticed in close confab with a few bosom friends whose battle scarred countenances bore about the same general plan of decoration as his own. Then things happened rapidly.

"Old Glory" fluttered down with the sunset gun. The First Lieutenant came off shore with the American Consul and a boatload of consular baggage. In the confusion of getting under way a sound rose as of a bulky body falling into the water. It was capped by a shout of "Man overboard!" and a rush of frantic Jackies to the side.

"It's Marlinspike, sir! Ho! it's pore Bill Marlin!" a husky seaman wailed. "E fell off'n the bridge; leas'-wise, he tripped over the gun turret. Anyways, the blighter hit on his head," the husky man said desperately, "an' he sinked like a shot. We ain't never goin' to see our pore ole Bill Marlinspike no more!"

"The man's crazy. Get out!" the First Lieutenant shouted. "Drop a life buoy aft there and over with the first cutter! Lively, men! And stop that confounded howling!" the officer cried irritably. "The man'll turn up, like all bad pennies."

But Bill Marlin did not turn up, though the first cutter went over the side, and the second and the third cutters, also a dozen intimate friends of Gunner Marlin's, clothes and all. The tide was running strong to sea. One by one the boats picked up the swimmers, most of whom were headed for the shore and resisted capture. The ship's crew went about their duties, strong men shaken by sols. On the bridge the First Lieutenant looked morosely at the commander, who answered his unspoken query with a grim smile.

"Of course a gunner's a gunner," the officer remarked; "but what strikes me, the men rather overdid the thing. One would think a real calamity had occurred."

"Yes, I noticed that," the commander said thoughtfully. "They are suspiciously hysterical."

So was the cabin steward, hunting high and low for the Captain's best shore-going uniform and gold hilted sword. So was the American Consul, rummaging his baggage for a favorite sole leather suitcase, inexplicably lost in the process of transhipment. Both of them continued searching long after the Chicago headed to sea.

But the First Lieutenant, wise in his generation, interviewed the wireless operator; for it occurred to him that President Castello's palace was equipped with wireless telegraph, after the fashion of Central American rulers, who sometimes find it convenient to call for help on the shortest possible notice.

**I**N the meantime, Gunner Marlin, tucked under the sun shield of a banana boat, down shore, with his feet on the thwart and a cutty pipe in his mouth, had witnessed with great interest the frantic efforts of his shipmates to rescue him.

When the Chicago's yellow funnels and "peach basket" mast dwindled away in the mist he knocked out his pipe with a sigh of contentment.

"The bunch sure treated me white, coverin' my retreat and dumping the Consul's luggage overboard for a bluff. W'at I am going to do now," he pursued with luxurious indolence, "I'm goin' to take to the bush, an' get me a vally. W'en the native surviver ain't fannin' off the skeeters, he's goin' to say to me, he says—"

"Los insurrectos, señor! The revolutionists!"

The boom of a gun and the exclamation of the negro boatman roused Marlin from his dream of bliss. The shot came from a little plateau where a squad of excited soldiers surrounded a field piece, which was elevated skyward, at an angle of forty-five degrees.

As he looked in amaze.



"I Am Chief of Police," the Sober Faced Man Said.

ment, the blue-clad gunners retreated to the edge of the rising ground and lay down holding their ears. From somewhere beyond the hill an answering cannon boomed, and a shot whistled high over the boat. Marlin gave a grunt of disgust.

"So them's revolutionists, are they? Now I know why them fellers never get hurted in these here Central Ameriky scraps. There she goes, shootin' at balloons, an' they ain't even swabbed the pore thing out!"

Bill Marlin was a man of action, in spite of his sybaritic leanings; besides, it tortured his soul to see a good gun mishandled. Also it occurred to him that if the revolutionists were already bombarding the city it behooved him to be in at the death.

In a twinkling he stripped off his jacket and canvas trousers and slipped into the Captain's purloined uniform. Smiling complacently at the boatman's wide-eyed wonder, he sprang ashore, buckling on his sword as he footed it for the battleground. He did not even stop to put his shoes on.

ON the hill, the blue-clad artillerymen, already showing signs of vacillation, stared open mouthed at the gorgeous apparition in navy white and gold.

Marlin nodded affably. "T's all right, boys. I just come to give a leg up. An', by Jinks, you seem to need it!"

He thanked a lucky Providence that ordained that his own tongue should be so well known, in a manner of speaking, in the seaport towns of Central America. His professional eye had already taken in the situation. On an adjacent hill an enemy's gun was blazing away at, or rather over, his own artillery squad. A four-horse mule team stood nearby coupled up to the ammunition caisson.

"H'm! Them Goverment fellers is goin' to mix things! 'Ere! Lemme try a crack at that growler!"

The willing soldiers fell back. Marlin ran his eye over the gun. He noted with surprise that it was a navy piece, awkwardly mounted on wheels.

"Casteller took her off his war junk, likely, and these here revolutionary fellers captured her. Well, here goes some of her back to him!"

He jerked the lanyard, and the gun roared, clanking; on the farther hill the enemy's cannon vanished in a cloud of dust. "First bullseye! 'Ere! Swab her out, you bluejays! We'll try for that donkey cart next."

Again the long navy gun roared. Instantly followed a loud explosion. From the artillery squad rose exclamations of wonder and triumph. The second shot had struck the ammunition wagon, the exploding powder reducing it to smoke, while the mules fled, their riders clinging to their necks.

"Spiled their toys an' never hurted a man! That's w'at the Cap calls modern warfare," Marlin grinned. "Ere you, quit that, will ye!" He struggled from the ecstatic embrace of the artillery officer.

"The revolution is beaten!" the officer cried. "The rebels are helpless without the cannon. We have saved the Government!"

"We have—who'd the—which?" Marlin stared. "Ain't you some hysterical, sonny?" He glared from the uniformed artillerymen to a band of ragged prisoners that the blue soldiers were already herding up the hill. "Who in blazes are you fellers, anyhow?" he burst out.

"We? We are the army of Castello," the officer said proudly. "The President himself will thank you, our brave compatriot!"

"Oh, will 'e?" Marlin groaned in bitter self-contempt. And, still, why not? His buoyant spirit rose in presence of misfortune. The excited bumboat man had misled him and he had fought on the wrong side; but maybe it was all for the best. Nobody in Castello's town knew him, and promotion and loot lay on the Government side now. He slapped the officer on the back.

"Heave ahead with the triumphal march, Major! We'll go an' be made Generals—an' I'll tap the pay-master in advance and cut away afore the old Chicago gits back," he added to himself.

AS they entered the city Marlin saw the ragged little band of revolutionists marched into prison, an old church near the waterfront.

"The rascals will be taken out and shot in the mornin'," the officer casually told him.

Marlin's conscience pricked him. Even the joyful populace and the pretty women fluttering handkerchiefs from the windows did not cheer him up. Somehow, as he neared the President's palace, he was oppressed by a premonition of evil.

It was not relieved when a staff officer slipped from the brilliant crowd on the palace steps and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Want me, bo?" Marlin suffered himself to be led through a side door into a room where a sober faced man in a sash of office sat smoking. "Huh! Jest goin' to have a drain, I reckon." Marlin fanned himself with his cap, uneasily conscious of his stolen uniform.

"I am Chief of Police," the sober faced man said. "We have received a wireless message from the cruiser Chicago—"

The floor surged under Marlin's feet.

"—asking us to arrest a deserting seaman, also guilty of assault, larceny, mutiny—"

"Ho! That's that darn First Lieutenant's doin's!" he checked himself. The Chief smiled. "I understand you have rendered the Government a service; but—the United States navy is powerful. Even should we let you escape—" the Chief shrugged his shoulders.

"Where you goin' to jug me?" Marlin demanded. A faint gleam of hope was already working in his head.

The Chief of Police looked distressed, as though he too saw the flagrant ingratitude of the proceedings. "Why, for that—we possess but one prison—where the revolutionists—"

"Them fellers I shot up? Oh, don't you bother about them," Marlin said boldly, but with wildly beating heart. "I'm one of them revolutionists myself. I jest got temp'rar'ly mixed. You can chuck me in your old jug along of my buddies. I don't object, son."

The Chief looked undecided. "If you don't hand me out the very wu'st you got," Marlin added hastily, "you'll get Billy blazes from our old man w'en he comes hack. If he finds me kind o' half loose, enj'yin' myself, he'll shanghai you an' his



"Ain't It Wu'th Somethin' for Downin' the Revolution?"

Nibs the President, like he done the Consul. 'Sides, if I'm loose, I may start another revolution, on'y I'd hate to show myself when I'm pinched."

"Oh, if you insist—" the Chief shrugged again, this time with relief. "Still, the President would regret if the revolutionists— Of course, they are to be shot."

"Aw, don't bother about them pore fellers havin' it in for me," Marlin reassured him. "They're likely to give you more trouble than they do me, specially when the shootin' begins to-morrow!"

With this cryptogrammatic remark Marlin amiably signified his readiness to retire behind prison bars.

AS he went to disgrace, he saw boatmen and sailors flocking from the waterfront to celebrate in the public square. "Ungrateful beggars!" he said and smiled grimly. "If them prisoners o' war kin on'y climb a rope now—"

Whatever Marlin's reception by the jailed revolutionists, it was a short one. According to the guards outside, there had been loud outcries accompanied by a rhythmic thumping as of heavy blows on unresisting bodies. There had been no further disturbance up to midnight, when the church bell tolled. They had been too sleepy to investigate why.

But Bill Marlin, shinning up the bellcord at that very moment, cursed the solicitude of the men below who had hauled it taut. "It jest shows you can't trust them dages out o' sight," he reflected when he reached the belfry and stopped to breathe. "Now for the wholesale jail delivery! Lucky I remembered this here backstay."

He hauled up the bellrope and a terrified revolutionist who dangled at the end of it. The two lugged up a third, and the work went merrily on. When the last man was safely on the roof, Marlin cut the rope from the bell and half-hitched it round a convenient chimney. The town below was wrapped in darkness and sleep.

"Now I'm givin' you fellers a last call in," he told them in a fierce whisper. "They won't be nobody on the beach nor the ship, likely. I'll save your hides if ye stick to me. If you break for the bush, I'll come after you with that navy gun. Now slide, Kelly!"

He dropped handily down the rope, and the others followed. With Marlin like a white phantom in the lead, they fitted through back alleys to the harbor, gleaming peacefully under a crescent moon.

The battleship Quinda lay just offshore. No smoke rose from her shadowy funnels, no lights shone on her decks. The machine of destruction waited for the god, in the person of Bill Marlin.

No sentry's eye saw the dark figures that climbed aboard from the shore boats and scattered over the

ship. As the silence continued, a dusky Lieutenant came forward to report progress, and Marlin, waiting with rolled up sleeves and a handspike, gave a grunt of disgust.

"Deserted ship for the grand fiesta, eh? An' they ain't a soul aboard! Well, hop for'd, a bunch o' ye, an' we'll get ready for the second day's celebration. Ho! I reckon things is lookin' up again!"

All night Gunner Marlin and his revolutionary crew hammered and tinkered at the big rusty turret gun, the rescued revolutionists working like black Trojans, in swords, cocked hats, and ragged odds and ends of picked up uniforms.

WHEN the gray light of morning dawned, the long black rifle, polished and loaded, frowned upon the town, its black muzzle lined upon the President's palace. Gunner Marlin, with his gold laced cap on the back of his head and his sleeves still rolled up from his hairy arms, complacently viewed the ominous preparations. "I guess that'll throw a scare into 'em, all right! An' I reckon that's about all I can do," he grinned. "I ain't got no trust in that mildewed powder, nor the gun neither. You Quashee, you sent my ultimatum ashore all right? It's time we heard from the palace."

"By the fisherman, yes, saar!" the Lieutenant answered nervously.

Marlin glanced sharply at the others. "Them blighters are skeered of Casteller's bunch, on'y they're worse skeered o' that gun I've jest fixed up. A healthy lot o' Nelsons they be!"

His attention was distracted by a boat coming off shore. In the stern he recognized the Chief of Police, and he grinned broadly as he assisted the visitor over the side.

"It is not possible that you are serious in your demands on the President, Mr.—Captain," the perturbed officer hesitated, gazing with wonder at the big warship gun in its rejuvenation, and the motley crew.

"Admiral!" Marlin suggested. "Oh, ain't I?" he jerked his thumb at the frowning turret gun. "The tables is turned, son!"

"But it is simply preposterous!" the Chief cried. "You demand a ransom of fifty thousand dollars for this, our navy."

"Spiggotty money," Marlin said regretfully. "You're in luck I don't demand real American dollars, instead of tin tags. On'y I know you ain't got none."

"And a free pardon for the revolutionists."

"That's on'y a square deal," Marlin returned. "Seen' I got 'em

in trouble inadvertent, I'm going to pull them out o' the hole ag'in. Nothin' small about Bill Marlin!"

"You'll never escape the country! Your own Government will give you up for piracy!" the angry Chief cried.

"Not if I got money," Marlin replied with confidence. "When I get the spuds I'll skip in my launch. I don't like your country, anyway. Your politics got me all mixed up." Marlin smiled amiably. "Oh, come now, be a sport, Major! You can't fight, you can't bluff, an' you can't beg off. If you don't pony up, I'll knock a few chips off yer boss's palace, an' I'll raise the ante. W'at'd you say now," he added speculatively, "if I was to order the President to come aboard and fetch a parson along, an' that purty little Miss President w'at the First Lieutenant's sweet on? By Jinks! I forgot all about her, bein' so busy. But that's w'at I'll do—"

"The man's mad!" The Chief stared at him aghast. "I know a gent w'at'll be a heap sight madder," Marlin said impressively. "I ain't quite decided about that diplomatic alliance; but they's no tellin' w'at I'll do if you crank me up. So be keerful!"

THOUGH Bill Marlin did not know it, being engaged in humming nonchalantly a few bars of "Captain Kidd," the car of Fate was being given an extra turn just then for his special benefit. A rapid exchange of undertones passed between the Chief of Police and the nearest of the cringing revolutionists. The officer nodded, with a covert smile.

"I shall carry your latest ultimatum to the President," he said as he went hastily over the side. "You shall have an answer very soon."

"Before noon I got to have action," Marlin said cheerfully.

"Oh, much sooner than then!" the Chief waved his adieu.

Marlin did not like his silky smile. Nor did he fancy the averted looks of his own swarthy crew. Something was in the air, and he sniffed trouble like a war-horse.

"There's some monkey business going on here!" he cried, facing the others fiercely. "Now w'at are you fellers—"

He got no further. In one concerted rush the whole crew made for him. But, quick as they were, Marlin was quicker. He paused only to crumple up the front rank with his mighty fists.

"Ye've sold me out, have you? I thought I learned you back in the prison! Take that—an' that—an' that!" Three men rolled with perfect unanimity in the scuppers. "You fixed with that foxy Chief to give me up

an' go free for it, did ye? An' arter I saved your necks too! They won't be worth savin' w'en I get done!"

Two men sprang from below with muskets and fixed bayonets. Putting all his giant strength into one final rush, he cleared the way to the big gun turret, sprang inside, and slammed the door in the mutineers' faces.

"Now, confound ye!" he panted, "I'll call time an' get my wind, while I think up w'at to do to ye next." He looked ruefully at the big gun. "They'd all drop dead if I fired her. By jinks! What am I going to do now, turn her loose on Casteller's palace before he pinches me again? Jinks! I won't get a chance! The old ark's swingin' with the tide. All bets is off! I'm as good as took now!"

Marlin, gazing morosely through the gunport, saw a man wigwagging with a signal flag on the palace roof. "W'at's e doin'? Tryin' to talk to me, or—"

THE hollow thr-rump of a six-pounder galvanized him into action. He straightened up, glaring with unbelieving eyes; for the cruiser Chicago was steaming into the harbor. He gave a cry of dismay.

"Now I am goosed! That's some o' that foxy President's doin's! Here's where I do take the count, if I ain't just groggy an' dreamin'! Nope, it's her, all right, Casteller went and wireessed 'em—that's what he done! Told 'em the show was over and they could come back, soon's I busted the revolution, an' fetch the Consul. An' he's come—rarin' crazy loony for me drownin' his baggage, an' the Cap clawin' his hair. Wait till he sees his clo'es! An' that bunch layin' for me on deck, and Casteller layin' for me ashore! I see my finish!"

He licked his dry lips as he pictured the assorted vengeance that hung over him.

"I'm in a impassy. They ain't no way out but a balloon, an' then the Cap'd bring me down. Oh, wait till the Lieutenant hears how I treed his paw in law, an' what I said about his girl! He'll shoot me from my own turret gun. Je-ru-salem!"

He sprang up, a final rush of inspiration linking martial imagery and the big turret rifle at his side.

"The Chicago don't know I'm runnin' this packet. If I can't paste the palace, I can toss her one, an' that'll fetch on a international complication." He gasped at the dazzling combination of consequences flashed over him. "The U. S.'ll hold Casteller responsible for what his ship done, an' they'll mop the floor with him, an' that'll queer the Lieutenant with the girl. Oh, I got 'em all strapped to the muzzle—and the Cap'll ram

these here sneakin' revolutionists for doin' it! I'll say they done it, an' he said he would."

The radiant glory of the temptation was too much for a man of Marlin's temperament. He sprang to the breach of the big rifle. "I'll bounce one off'n her for luck. I'm takin' even chances with this old popgun, anyhow. She's jest as apt to shoot both ways at once."

OUT on the blue waters of the harbor the unconscious Chicago moved toward her anchorage. Outside Marlin's improvised prison the mutineers howled promises of amendment, alarmed by the advent of the American ship. Within the turret the imperturbable Marlin prepared to make naval history.

The Chicago's basket mast entered the line of fire; still he held his hand. In his heart he hated to "go hurtin' up the old packet"; but Fate was inexorable. The cruiser's funnels, gleaming golden in the sun, were too much for him. With a shout of defiance he jumped back, jerking the gun lanyard.

The concussion rocked the ship, tearing her from her anchor chain. Marlin, stunned and breathless, picked himself up from the floor, fanning away the blinding powder smoke. The breach of the old turret gun still blocked the port; but the long protruding barrel had disappeared. Then he understood what had happened. "Busted her, by thunder! An' never touched the old Chi!"

He did not wait to see what other damage he had done aboard. As he staggered out on deck he got a glimpse of the terrified mutineers falling over one another down the hatchway. Then he mounted the rail and dived overboard.

ON the bridge of the Chicago the officers stared at the erupted battleship with amazement.

"What under the sun do those fireworks mean?" the commander demanded. "Are those awkward fools trying to salute with a ten-inch rifle?"

"It must be an accident, sir," the Lieutenant said. "See, they've managed to blow up the gun. A chunk of it whizzed over us. By Jove! I wondered why the palace was wigwagging us. There's mutiny aboard, sir, or the rebels have taken the ship!"

"If they have, that's Castello's lookout," the Captain growled. "What's that in the water?"

The bridge officers focused their glasses on Bill Marlin, puffing and blowing like a grampus, making for the cruiser. As he grasped a rope and climbed aboard,

dripping and disreputable, the First Lieutenant made a dash for him.

"By Jove, sir! I'll wager this fellow is at the bottom of it!"

Marlin dodged instinctively, wiping the sea water out of his eyes. "Oh, yer Honor," he cried beseechingly, "jest lemme hand her one shot, if we ain't going to ram her! I knows where them revolutionists is hiding in her. Yes, sir, it's the revolutionists that swiped her," he hastily explained, "w'en the reg'lar crew was ashore. They shanghaied me w'en—I wasn't lookin' for trouble."

"Who fired that gun?" the Lieutenant demanded.

"Them ungrateful mutin'—the revolutionists w'at I licked, sir," Marlin answered promptly. "They done it to make trouble 'twixt President Casteller an' the States, jest out o' spite, an' then skipped below."

"How came you ashore in the first place, Marlin?" The commander was grimly smiling down at the disreputable figure. If those dripping white ducks were his spruce uniform, he did not recognize it.

"Well, sir," the culprit said hesitatingly, "I heard w'at you said about President Casteller needing a good gunner, and I kind o' remembered it w'en I falls overboard an' is washed up on the beach—along o' bein' hit by something that fell on me, like a piece o' the Consul's baggage mebbe. You kin see the mark, sir." He rubbed his bruised head, covertly scowling at the giggling Jackies. "So, knowin' how you felt, and Lieutenant Selding, sir, when the fight started I took a hand, and things happened like I said, an'," he wound up lamely, "I can prove it!"

The First Lieutenant looked grimly at the commander, and the latter glanced at the wretched old battleship, turning her bows sorrowfully to sea.

"Pipe away my launch," he said. "We'll see what President Castello knows about this. If there has been infraction of international law, it may be well to send Marlin ashore as a witness—"

For the first time Bill Marlin knew fear. "Oh, yer Honor!" he cried. "Don't ask me to mix up in dago politics again! All I beg is to lead a peaceful life aboard a Christian fightin' ship, obeyin' orders an' makin' no trouble for anybody. Ain't it wu'th somethin' for savin' Mr. Casteller's Government, sir, an' downin' the revolution?"

His glance met the Lieutenant's and the commander's twinkling eyes in mutual comprehension and agreement, and peace settled upon Marlin's unquiet soul.

## WHERE BLISSY OVERPLAYED

By Sewell Ford

Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson



IT just got home the other afternoon, out at Rock-hurst on the Sound, and had only finished groetin' Sadie on the front steps, when around the corner of the house rolls a coffee colored gent, all got up in white ducks with an open front blouse and wearin' a cap that says "Tootsie" on the front of it. Also he's carryin' a market basket.

"Hello!" says I. "Who's landin' marines now? Where did the yo-ho chorus hand come from?"

"Why, that must be Blissy's steward," says Sadie. "He's here with his new yacht, you know."

"Blissy with a yacht!" says I. "Then Auntie must have loosened."

"For good," says she. "Didn't I tell you? It happened out in California over two months ago, and the estate was settled last week. Blissy is on his first cruise."

"Gee! He ain't losin' any time, is he?" says I. "Well, it was expected, you know," says Sadie, "and he's been waiting long enough, goodness knows!"

THERE was no denyin' that part of the proposition; for, ever since I've known anything about him, waitin' for a telegram has been Blissy's steady occupation. But maybe you've noticed how healthy these rich aunts can be sometimes.

I must say for Blissy, though, that he stood the strain well. He managed to worry along on the two hundred a month she doled out to him, kept up his club dues, stood off his tailor noble, and accepted all the

week end invites that come his way. Course, everyone knew he was due to be handed a big bundle sooner or later; so he was treated just like he belonged.

Not only that, but they let him ring in his partic'lar chum, J. Cushing Taite, who makes his entrance into the smart push about as well indorsed as the kid who slides in with the team carryin' the bat bag, or leadin' the goat mascot. I forgot what was the whole of the pet name they has for Mr. Taite, something like Fidus Achates; but most everyone shortens it to Fido, which describes him a heap better.

I never got his pedigree exact, either; but I always understood he was a third cousin to some one who really counted, and that his excuse for dodgin' actual work was the fact that he holds one of these cinch jobs connected with the runnin' of some estate.

Anyway, him and Blissy made a great pair, and folks seemed to find their brother act useful as well as amusin', especially at house parties, where faithful bridge players and good dancin' men were apt to be scarce.

Besides that, they was more or less ornamental, specially this Blissy gent. He's a big, well padded party, with a chest on him like a circus strong man, and if he hadn't been some forty pounds overweight he might have posed as a Venus Apollonaris. All but his face. I don't know what was wrong with it, but it looked like it had been made of putty by an amateur who was in a hurry to finish the job. You know—one of these big, round, flabby faces that has about as much expres-

sion as the front elevation of a custard pie.

Add to that combination a mincin' walk which made him act like he was doin' a continuous minuet, and a fine, ladylike voice, and maybe you can get some idea of Blissy's style. Playin' a pipe organ was his special stunt; but, as musical instruments like that ain't common in country houses, he don't often get a chance to perform.

As for Mr. Taite, he's as slim and dapper as Blissy is thick and logy. He's one of these nervous, fussy little chaps, quick and keen about most things, and an all round sport. He can jump a long legged hunter over five bars before luncheon, and spend the afternoon nursin' billiard balls gentle along the cushion. He plays a snappy game of tennis, and when it comes to doin' cotillion stunts on the ballroom floor, he's right there with the goods. On general form I should say he had Blissy outclassed at every point; but around in the bunch where they circulates he's only Fido, who's asked along just because he's one of a team.

"I expect he's aboard with Blissy, eh?" says I to Sadie.

"Oh, of course," says she. "And there are eight or ten others. They must be somewhat crowded, for the Tootsie isn't very big; but, you see, Blissy made up his party before he chartered his yacht. They're going to cruise up as far as Newport."

"Sounds swell, don't it?" says I. "But why are they layin' up here?"

Well, it seems Blissy wants to give a little moonlight dinner party on deck for some of our crowd. The Purdy-Pells and Pinekney are invited, and, as he's usin' our waterfront for a landin' place, of course we're on the list too. He'd planned to pull it off the next night; but as there was some hitch about gettin' 'em all together, and as it's convenient bein' anchored near so many friends, he puts it off until Thursday.

THAT'S how it happens we sees so much of this cruisin' party and gets revelations concernin' this affair of Mrs. Trixie De Graw. And, say, wherever you find a frisky young widow along, nine chances out of ten there's bound to be something worth reportin'.

Sadie, she cops out the situation durin' the first evenin' the Tootsie was at anchor off our back yard, while we was bein' shown over the boat. "Ah ha!" she whispers to me, passin' me the nudge at the same time, and pointin' to the trio that drifts along together. It's Blissy on one side, Fido on the other, and